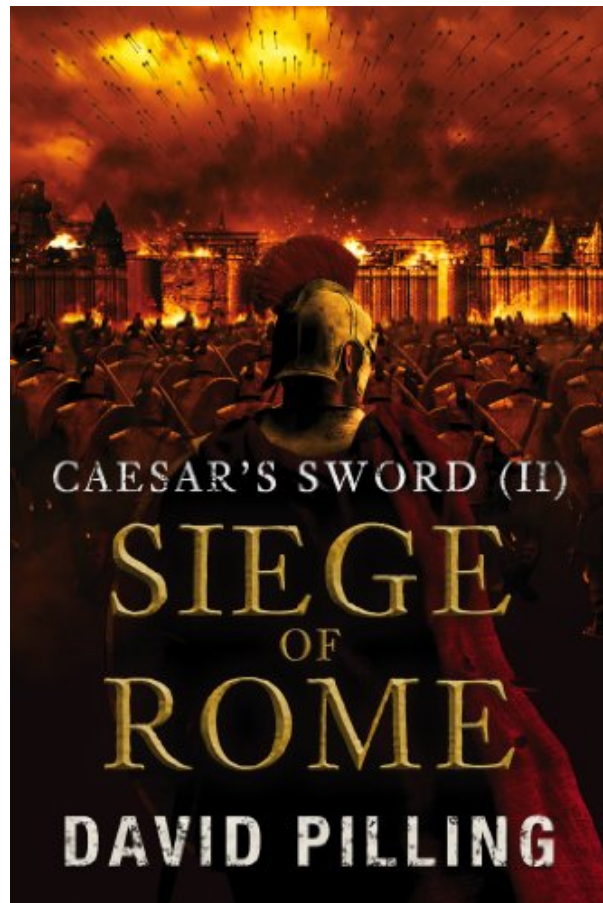
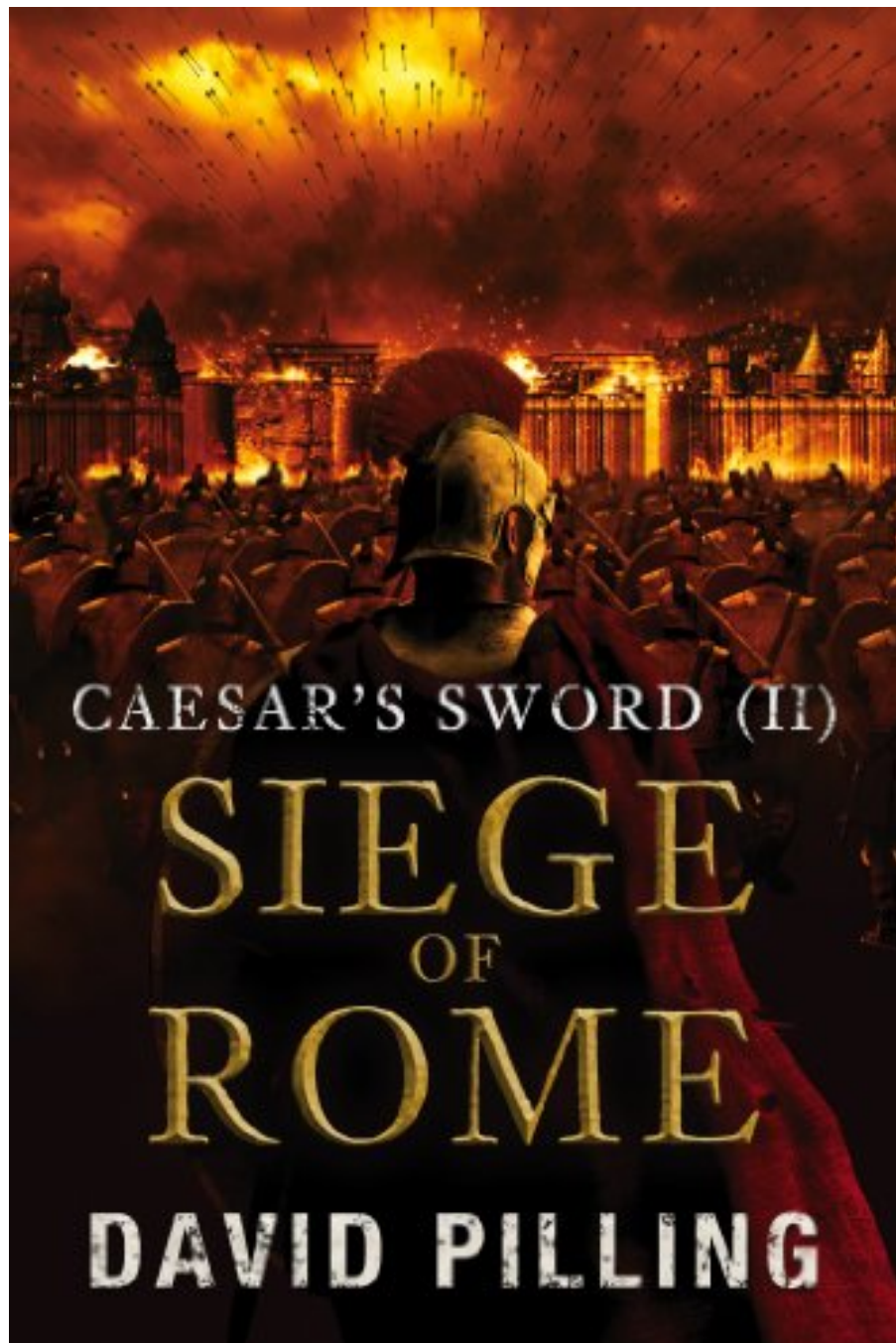


CAESAR'S SWORD (II) SIEGE OF ROME BY DAVID PILLING



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PDF

After centuries of being on the defensive, the Roman Empire is on the march once again...

Constantinople, 537 AD: after the successful reconquest of North Africa, the Emperor Justinian starts to entertain grand dreams of restoring the shattered Western Empire. He despatches his golden general, Flavius Belisarius, with an army of twelve thousand men to drive the Goths from Italy and recover Rome, the Eternal City and ancient capital of the Roman world.

For Coel ap Amhar, King Arthur's grandson, the Italian campaign is an opportunity to escape his growing number of enemies in Constantinople. But the early successes of Belisarius quickly fade, as Rome is surrounded by an overwhelming horde of Goths, commanded by their dread king, Vitiges.

Stalked by assassins, thrown into one desperate battle after another, Coel's life and liberty are at stake as Belisarius makes his final stand in the siege of Rome...

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Most helpful customer reviews

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Somewhat better

By JPS

This is the second volume of the Caesar's sword series and it picks up the story of Coel, grandson of a certain warlord called Artorius. Coel ended up as a refugee and slave in Constantinople, where he grew up. After many adventures that are part of the first volume, including his participation in the Nika riots and in the reconquest of Roman North Africa over the Vandals, he is enrolled in Belisarius' guards and accompanies the general as he sets out to reconquer Italy for his master the Emperor Justinian.

At the outset of this review, I must admit that I did not like the first volume so that I had a bit of a negative bias when I started this one and was largely expecting "more of the same". Instead, I found it better than what I feared and certainly better than the previous instalment. I still had problems with it, however, although I also liked some of the features introduced by the author.

My first problem is similar to the one I had with the previous title: there are bits and pieces of the story that

are difficult to believe and far-fetched, at best, or even rather incredible, at worst. I will not repeat my previous review about how implausible it is for Caesar's sword, a gladius, to be preserved intact for half a millennium. However, since Coel, the hero of this story, keeps using it, I can only mention how incredible it is for a short trusted sword that was essentially an infantry man's weapon to be used on horseback by a cavalryman. What is even more extraordinary is that said cavalryman not only survives but even wins most of his various encounters despite being so inadequately equipped. A second problem is also one encountered in the first volume with the Vandals. The Ostrogoths did not have horse archers so that this "invention" from the author is simply historically wrong.

This leads me to a more general issue that comes in various guises and can be found across this book. Both the characters and some of the fictional features of the story simply lacked credibility. One possible reason for this may be because the author has taken the works of Procopius, the main source for Belisarius' campaigns, a bit too literally.

Whatever the reason, the end result is that some of the characters are rather hard to believe. This is still the case with the Empress Theodora, depicted in a rather unsubtle way as some vindictive and depraved monster who seeks the hero's demise quite persistently because he refused her favours a couple of decades ago when he was a mere slave. Another is that of Justinian himself, who is still depicted as a weak, a bit of a fool and largely manipulated by his wife. A similar vaudeville-style scenario - the powerful but gullible husband manipulated by the beautiful and very unscrupulous wife - is applied to the relationship between Belisarius and Antonina. Another implausible character is that of Photius, presented as Antonina's son. He also "hates" our hero and seeks to harm him as much as possible, but the reason for this is rather lame, to put it mildly (Photius is lead to believe that Coel tried to "rape" his mother, the wife of his general!).

I found some of the other characters more plausible. This was largely the case with Mundus, the Gepid general serving Justinian, although his "barbaric" appearance may be a bit overdone. I also liked Procopius, and the author's decision to make him into much more than Belisarius' mere secretary is a very plausible one, if only because it explains how he could have access to all the materials and information that can be found in his works.

The main strongpoint of this book is the retelling of the conquest of Sicily and South Italy, and the first part of the first siege of Rome. The various military events are directly taken from Procopius. This is particularly the case for the fighting retreat and the series of engagements that turned out rather badly as Belisarius and his cavalry were pushed back against the (closed) gates of Rome. Also taken directly from Procopius is the clamouring from the Romans to participate in the fighting, sally and fight a pitched battle against a host which is allegedly hundred and fifty thousand strong. Although the Ostrogoths certainly outnumbered the East Romans, the total number of fighting men in their forces is very unlikely to have exceeded a third of this number, and was probably considerably lower. If they really had been this numerous, they would have had little problem in blockading Rome and its twelve miles of walls completely. In addition, Belisarius would never have accepted a pitch battle against them, even under pressure from certain Roman senators and some firebrands among the Roman population. In fact the whole notion that Belisarius "gave in" and allowed himself to be convinced against his better knowledge to fight this battle is somewhat suspicious. It looks like Belisarius' secretary coming up with a convenient but not very credible excuse for deflecting, or at least reducing the blame that would otherwise be concentrated on his boss.

Finally, there are two sets "little glitches". Taken in isolation, these are details and they are hardly worth mentioning. Taken together, however, they can be annoying and give "bad" impressions. The first set of glitches is made up of the typos. These are mostly missing words, generally articles. There are however a sufficient number of these to give the disagreeable impression that the book has not been subject to adequate

proof-reading.

The second set includes what I would term the “technical glitches”. One of these is a mention of Justinian being surrounded by six hundred guards. Unfortunately, his Excubitores bodyguard only numbered three hundred at the time. Here again, the impression create by this “glitch” (and a few other similar ones) is a bit unpleasant. It feels like either the research that went into this book was somewhat superficial or that there has been insufficient proof-reading to “iron out” these glitches.

Three stars, although this may be a bit generous especially since the author has written a number of other titles which are better conceived and which do not give the impression of having been rushed into publication.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Good sequel

By Amazon Customer

Once again the main character gets dragged in "byzantine" conspiracies. For me, the main attraction of this book series was the time period that the author chose to cover. I had little knowledge of the reconquest of Rome and this pushed me into doing some more research in history. I always find it interesting when authors get away from the well covered periods of time. And a good read...

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Bold and Exciting

By Paul Bennett

The grandson of Arthur, Coel, is put through the wringer by the author in this the second volume in the Caesar's Sword series. If it isn't vengeful people in Justinian's court, it's Vandals in Africa, if it isn't them it's the Goths in Italy, if it isn't them, it's people in Belisarius own household, all of them want him dead Make no mistake, Coel has a lot of enemies. David Pilling as wrought an exciting tale that follows the famous General Belisarius who is given the task of retaking Rome from the Ostrogoths who have held it for decades but a Vandal rebellion in Africa must be dealt with first. Taking Rome from the Goths is accomplished but now the trick is to keep it as the city is under siege by 120,000 Goths. The author is once again in top form as he gives us a scintillating story of the genius of Belisarius while intertwining the trial and tribulations of Coel who is not immune to outside forces despite being an officer on Belisarius staff. Descriptive, imaginative and replete with the glory of war and the machinations of behind the scene shenanigans of those who would bring Coel down, Siege of Rome is a worthy successor to The Red Death and will continue in book 3, Flame of the West. 5 stars.

About the author:

I'm an English writer and researcher, addicted to history for as long as I can remember. I spent much of my childhood dragging my long-suffering parents up and down the misted ruins of castles in Wales, and the medieval period has always held a particular fascination for me. I am also interested in the Roman period, the Dark Ages and the British Civil Wars of the 17th century.

My first published novel, Folville's Law, followed the adventures of Sir John Swale during the dying days of Edward II's catastrophic reign. It was followed by twelve mini-sequels.

My stand-alone novel, The Half-Hanged Man, was told from the perspective of three characters and focused on the mercenary Free Companies that plagued Christendom in the latter half of the 14th century.

The White Hawk (I) and (II) form part of a planned 4-part series set during The Wars of the Roses, and chronicle the trials and adventures of the Boltons, a family of minor Staffordshire gentry, as they attempt to survive this particularly bloody period of English history.

Caesar's Sword tells the story of Coel ap Amhar, King Arthur's bastard grandson, and his adventures in the glittering, lethal environment of Constantinople and the Late Roman Empire.

Fireship Press have just released *Nowhere Was There Peace*, a tale of espionage and power politics set during The Second Baron's War, just after the Battle of Evesham.

I have also written a series of fantasy novels with my friend and co-writer, Martin Bolton.

All my novels are available as ebooks and paperbacks.

Enjoy!

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